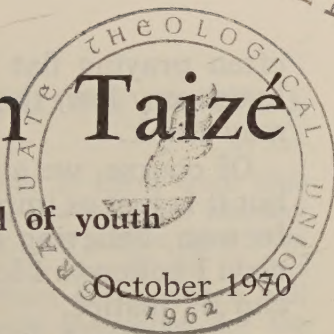


# Letter from Taizé

Preparing the council of youth



N° 3

---

Quarterly — editor & administrator : Community of Taizé (71)  
France — Subscription : 7.- F per annum by international Money  
Order (or : CCP «Aujourd'hui» 614.46 Lyon).

---

## Letter from the Prior

The preparation of the Council of Youth has committed us to an « inner adventure » — such was the reaction of an African economist to our undertaking. All through this summer we have been trying, with the young people who were here at Taizé, to immerse ourselves in the invisible, subterranean movement of the Church. Some of us even wondered if this « inner adventure » was not going to involve us in a time of clandestine activity. This autumn, seeing so many young people arriving here at Taizé spontaneously, I can sense that an event is taking shape.

The meetings at Taizé are marked by a great diversity of tendencies and aspirations — politicised trends not being absent.

At the heart of each day spent here there is one dominating factor : coming before God, in common prayer and also, for many, in prayer alone :

often praying flat against the ground. When we kneel very low, the body expresses more than we may think.

Of course, we always have to say « I believe », but it is just as important to say « I am searching ». In man, believing and searching are complementary. I believe... I look first of all for the Kingdom and its justice.

... The Kingdom : that is to say : contemplation, the discovery of the depths of the Church — prayer — love for Christ, love for the Church. To love Christ in isolation leads to narrowness ; to love Christ, to love his body the Church, is one and the same thing and I never grow tired of saying so.

... but at the same time, justice : putting an end to the superiority of oppressive forces, discovering how to be brothers for all men, not just those we may have chosen. To promote this justice there is a courage to be found : courage closely attached to enthusiasm and the spirit of festival — without that our outlook grows bitter and pessimistic, we judge others unconditionally. Seven months after the announcement of the council of youth, an astonishing impetus, far beyond what had been foreseen, has been granted to the attempt to combine in ourselves a life of prayer and the search for justice, love for the Church and a commitment in favour of man, trust in Christ and the movement towards poverty.

Your brother Roger

## A SUMMERLONG FESTIVAL

Between July 14 and September 15 there were nine international meetings, each lasting a week from Monday to Monday, without a break. 7,600 young people aged from 17 to 29 took part in them. But for the whole of this year some 20,000 young people, from 65 countries, will have spent time in Taizé to prepare themselves for the council of youth. Even now, others are arriving all the time either alone or with a few friends; once on the hill they meet in small groups, spontaneously, to search together.

Three times a day all, workers from Milan, students at the Sorbonne, a farmer from Albi, a Congolese seminarist, young people from a parish in Hamburg : catholics, protestants, orthodox, agnostics, atheists come together for the prayers of the community. Everybody takes part, whatever they feel it means, whatever they find. Perhaps because all feel the essential to be there?

Each Monday this summer 500 - 1000 young people arrive to take the place of those who are just leaving. The living conditions are of the simplest : every one brings a tent or finds a place to sleep in the big tents and sheds on the field.

On the Monday evening there is a meeting to open the week. A few describe things they have lived since Easter in the way of preparing the council. Then the theme is introduced : the festival.

From the start the crowd is broken up into a host of small cells of 7; the idea of this is to make exchanges easier, to allow each one to express himself and, above all, to offer a real possibility of living a fraternal relationship with others.

These temporary cells are asked to live together for a week : meals, relaxation, manual work, contacts with



the immigrant workers who are so numerous in the region. And from day to day they reflect on what the theme of festival means to each one, in the context of his own life ; what the word festival can still suggest when societies and churches are in a situation which is far from festive.

« As a kind of challenge we were asked to live the week's meeting in temporary cells of seven people who had not chosen their companions. Young people as different as it is possible to be : work, religion, mother tongue, political inclinations. All that we had in common was our age and the ability to communicate in French. Our cell had two Italians (boy and girl) — an Argentinian monk — a Dutchman — a Belgian couple on honeymoon, they were ever so nice and very spontaneous ! — a Frenchman.

» The first two days were difficult, trying even. The foreigners spoke French, but their processes of reflection and expression were so much slower than ours. So we learnt to listen, taking time... because we had to. Wonderful ! We had a poet and a whole range of people of different kinds. »

Every small group makes a short synthesis of their exchanges, or indicates one significant feature. Then there are general meetings, held in the church of Reconciliation, where the principal themes are discovered in all these examples and suggestions. The young people themselves provide a simultaneous translation in five languages.

This confrontation of points of view and of experiences provokes new, demanding questions, such as cannot be treated at a purely intellectual level — they call for the commitment of a whole life. The small groups meet again then, to determine even more precisely just what this festival is, and what conditions have to be fulfilled if all men are to have access to it.

Certain serious questions recur constantly during these discussions, they are made the subject of special meetings with themes such as : belief in the resurrection — political action — festival, suffering and death — the fight for justice and the festival for others — is God unnecessary ? — festival and working life — forgiveness, eucharist and the festival within the christian — reciprocity between continents — prayer as festival — is money

an obstacle to the festival? — festival in a technological society.

Twice during the week the young people meet in the church around the prior. Beforehand they have written all kinds of different questions (one week 110!). Brother Roger gives, as he says, «the beginnings of a reply, a little like a dialogue within oneself». And at the end he gives an answer, privately, to those whose questions he has not been able to answer publicly.

On the Saturday the reflexion is on how to work for the preparation of the council of youth once back home. Young people from the same region meet around the questions : where should the emphasis be put in your country (or your region) by all those preparing for the council? Personally what can you already imagine that you might undertake to live, either alone or with a few others, until Easter 1971?

It is far from easy to find words for the atmosphere of these days — there is a celebration of life in many simple things — but those who took part will remember : awkward conversations in several different languages during endless meals ; existential exchanges on faith, the meaning of life, spontaneous discussions going on late into the night ; a bonfire in the crater with people singing «*laudato sii*» in Italian ; exchanges about experiences lived in shanty-towns in Africa ; the background noise of grasshoppers singing and guitars playing ; day and night in the little village church people praying. Here are a few echoes written by some participants :

### *Prayer as festival*

«During those days I prayed. My prayer, although it was silent, was never lonely or isolated, the same Christ was praised by all. Prayer had become for me an integral part of a really common life. It was one particular aspect of the sharing which was before and which continued after.»

Spontaneously, nearly every week, there is a night of continuous prayer. A list is put up at the reception hut

and everyone can inscribe, either personally or as a group, for a half-hour's watch. So, from the night Office of Saturday until the first service on Sunday, there is a relay of prayer.

« During the night of prayer I was struck by the zone of complete silence observed in the crypt. In other places the prayer took on various forms : songs, litanies, prayers said aloud, music, even (surprise !) the rosary. In one corner of the church a group was improvising a kind of liturgical celebration. Candles and incense were burning. The atmosphere was intense ; complete silence, broken by a chant, a tune on a guitar, a few *aves*, then silence again. Some fell asleep occasionally, but had the Lord of the Gospels come at that moment, there is no doubt that the only thing that would have counted would have been the joy of being waited for. That festival of being together again towards which we all strive... »

### *Seven young people in Northern Ireland*

A group of 25 young people, catholics and protestants, already preoccupied by the war of religion raging in Northern Ireland : they came to Taizé, the majority stayed there while 7 of them left for Ireland to meet christians working for the reconciliation of the hostile groups. They visited the trouble spots, before coming back to Taizé to share what they had lived and heard.

« Being preoccupied by the problem of ecumenism, we felt personally concerned by this conflict. Once there we felt things at a non-intellectual, epidemic, level. Now, we are not the same people as when we set out. Something happened between those who received us and ourselves.

» Seeing things from a distance, rationally, it is hard to understand why people should be fighting in the streets in this day and age. But when you live in the segregation there, you understand how it can break down into violence. In Ulster, catholic and protestant children never meet. When they speak to one another, it's throwing stones and spitting slogans.

» When we visited an area in Belfast where riots had broken out, the officer who let us take photos said : "This side of the barricades, if anyone asks who you are, say that you are protestants ; but the other side, say that you're Catholic journalists from France."

» We wondered what became of Christ in the middle of this "holy war". A minister told us that in Ireland there was a lot of religion but not many christians. But in our countries is it so very different ? »



## *Christians and non christians*

Many at Taizé are not christians. They are ready to speak of their experiences of festival, joy, liberation, happiness, whilst refusing the idea of being rooted in any christian tradition. A certain number came driven by the desire to understand from within what motivates christians. Such an attitude is also the starting point for certain christians seeking to anchor their faith more deeply.

« As a non believer, I was struck by our profound agreement on many important points — even beneath an apparent diversity of opinions. I discovered christianity from within, instead of by books, by the christians themselves. In this way I was able to understand the Resurrection of Christ — until then it had always been a complete mystery for me. I think that many non believers hope for a lot from the renewed, purified christianity which can be detected through this preparation for the council. »

For a certain number of young non believers, language constitutes a barrier; christians speak honestly enough of the resurrection, but find it very difficult to translate this reality in such a way as to make it accessible to all. One person asked this question : « *If you really live the festival, why not find a language allowing it to be translated into the concrete life of every man? If the resurrection is source of life for you christians, ought you not to be able to show contemporary man how to stimulate hope and festival today ?* »

By questions of this kind we are brought to the basic problem : how to go beyond simple coexistence between christians and non christians ? How to combine an attitude of openness to all with being rooted in faith ? At this stage in the preparation of the council we are already up against an essential problem. We shall need much creativity to help solve it.

## *An evening at the Crater*

A meeting around a camp fire is also a festival. That happens at the « crater », a word well chosen to evoke the

leaping flames, the thunder of applause, songs, joy : a crater built up by young people with rubble, planks and stones ; like a theatre in the round.

« This evening there were even loudspeakers, lighting effects being left to the fancy of the flame. All through the evening a succession of young people told jokes, read texts, sang, each in his own language — French, Spanish, Vietnamese. The guitar plays a very active part : there are negro spirituals and pop tunes, nostalgic traditional songs and songs of the hope for revolution. We sing life, love, friendship, brotherhood, liberty ; we shout our refusal of war, misery, racialism : freedom for the oppressed is announced and Jesus Christ, risen, is proclaimed saviour of men. There are no spectators, all take part — picking up a well-known chorus, clapping a rhythm. It's a festival... »

### *Questions...*

Of course there were those who were disappointed as well : options, aspirations, tendencies are so varied. The summer has had its hours of contestation : mainly of the language used and of the methods employed (« not enough manual work », « questions badly formulated ») but also of the contents of the theme, of things undertaken by those taking part, of the very preparation of the council, etc.

Amongst the remarks made, certain wished for the presence of more working people. It must be said that it is especially amongst French participants that this imbalance between workers and students exists. Other frequently-heard remarks :

« I notice that many come here as individuals, I suspect that they may rapidly become discouraged when they go back to face the demands of life without any real support for what they try to do. How can this support be established ? »

« I want us to try very hard to be honest with our non christian brothers. From now on, instead of vague discussions about the relationships between christians and non christians, we have to put that reconciliation into practice. »

« As far as the language goes, I think it is very important to become clearer about a certain number of notions which I for one find rather hazy : source of life — eucharist — resurrection — Christ — God — Church. Those are central notions of christian life and of course they cannot be defined as a dictionary defines ; all the



same, they ought not to be used as though it was all perfectly obvious. For many, the preparation of the council may consist in coming to grips with these notions.»

« I reckon that the word council only interests the church, but we have to challenge the world to change it — that is how the church will be transformed. And we must make it possible for young people of every class to take part with us.»

A young Englishman writes :

« I found a problem of languages and mentalities. The common language was French, with its particular genius for suggestive, poetic expressions. These sometimes leave cold when translated : sometimes you feel a bit left out. The challenge here has to be accepted : why is this language of "interior" life so difficult for us ? Why is there no word in English with the force of "*la fête*" ? Perhaps the "inner adventure" is the risk involved in looking at things in a new way, discovering a new mentality ? »

## RECEIVING THE SENSE OF FESTIVAL FROM THE SOUTHERN CONTINENTS

### *The paschal sense of being*

This year all those taking part in the summer meetings had to reflect on the experience of « festival - liberation » which, for the christian, is begun in the resurrection of Christ : « He comes to quicken a festival in the innermost heart of man » is the first act of faith in the « joyful news » announced at Easter. In the coming years the other acts of faith will be gone into, each in turn. Each stage is pushed up by the one before — like a seed growing, first the stalk, slowly, then the flower, then the fruit ; here as there, the growth of a life. Through a host of concrete actions, the force of the Easter news will pass into life.

During the meetings the young people here lived and celebrated the festival - encounter, celebration of a communion. But surely, in a deeper sense, Christ himself in each one was all the time celebrating the festival of his Passing ?

Some powerful words have come out of these meetings. The festival sets free, leads towards others, cannot be without the struggle for justice. All this can be seen in the words spoken at the end of one meeting by Margarita Moyano — general secretary of Latin-American Catholic Youth and whose presence assures that the voice of the Third World is at the very heart of the preparation of the council :

*« A lot of you have found this week at Taizé to be like a halt in an oasis, recovering your strength. And now you intend to announce to those around you the "joyful news" and the preparation of a council of youth. Let that be, as someone has said, not so much by your words as by your life, a life that is a sign : small, seemingly without effect, but luminous, communicative. Think of the Paschal Vigil on Saturday night, nothing but the one paschal candle to pierce the darkness : from it a small candle is lit, which gives its flame to others — in a few moments the darkness of the whole church is illuminated, it becomes as bright as day.*

*» This symbol shows the paschal sense of life. There are many nights in a life — nights of our limits and failures, of suffering and faith, nights for ever made bright by Christ in his death and his resurrection, there we find a sense to the non-sense of our daily suffering, our daily deaths.*

*» Then even our death has a sense. One of you said : "My death will be for me my real birth. In the womb, the child lives from his mother without knowing her. Birth is a break, a kind of death leading to a new life where the child will see and know his mother. We live from God without knowing him, in the darkness of faith ; but one day we shall see his face, we shall discover who he is. So I look forward to my death as a festival because for me it is the narrow gate leading to life, to total vision."*

*» So we live a tension of hope, at once trying and life-giving, which drives us to act to make the festival possible,*

in spite of everything, for ourselves, for others, for all.

» *Struggle for the festival... but as expressed by Maximinio, the young farm worker from North-East Brazil, struggle with a heart which is poor, reconciled, which attempts not to hate, tending towards a unity, wanting to love. Struggle for the liberation of man : a festival - liberation.*

» *The word has been like a leitmotiv, always reappearing : liberation from enslavement, liberation of energies, of all that is latent in us, all that is still undeveloped. We bear a double conviction : that man is called to be fulfilled, that the earth is called to be accomplished.*

» *On this journey we want to be like the pilgrim — to be more sure of arriving at his goal he gets rid of useless baggage, anything likely to weigh him down : privilege, means of power, the service of the powers that be ; constantly struggling to emerge from captivity, breaking the chains that bind him — injustice, selfishness, misery, hatred, fear, slavery, alienation.*

*Then we shall discover the paschal sense of life.»*

### *Festival - liberation*

The price that we of the North have paid to become what we are is enormous. It has been paid by the Third World, by the under-privileged of our own, rich, countries, but most of all by ourselves : we who live in the Northern hemisphere have for the most part lost all access to deep values, such as festival.

« *In our Western countries are we not trying desperately to avoid the hardening of life ? — not the necessary, every-day hard things but that lived by men unable to listen to others because they are absorbed by the possibilities offered by an achievement ; we forget that these possibilities have become necessities controlling our lives. Yet just this preoccupation eliminates communication with others, joy, simplicity, mercy.»*

In our societies all the stress is laid on productivity and efficiency. So man has become poor. What is the role



of fancy? Where are the *values* typical of the festival — happiness, quiet joy, fulfillment, liberation from oppression?

Compare this with what a girl from the Congo has written :

« The African festival is always a sign of intense life. Life evokes the festival to relate the present to past and future. No festival without others — if possible, all the others, since festival is also the celebration of a communion. It is the opportunity offered for all to feel the richness of total life, dancing together, singing together, thrilling with vitality together. Festival is a song of life, it would soak all human existence, even every thing that is. »

Those coming from Asia, Africa, Latin America, whilst aware of the need for a technological revolution in their countries, have exhorted those young people living in technological civilisations not to put aside the essential values lived in the Southern continents : communion, sharing, festival.

The youth of the Northern hemisphere, having received the sense of festival from the South, must needs set to work at once to share it with those as yet unable to live it. Receiving the festival means giving it, and so the full dimension of reciprocity is achieved.

« For us the festival we are living has no intrinsic sense, it finds its sense in what we do about racialism, about the exploitation of Africans who immigrate and have no work, about the exploitation of unskilled young workers without any future, about the problems of Italian workers in Switzerland and the scandal of the "Schwarzenbach initiative", about the exploitation of the poor countries by the rich, so-called christian countries, about the arms race in the service of nationalistic interests, about culture reserved for a privileged class. »

Margarita Moyano asked the same question : « As a Latin-American, can I ask you, are you ready? Ready to yield the privilege of being a rich people? Ready, for instance, to pay taxes, higher prices, to allow more international justice? That means a huge effort of conscientisation. Are you ready to believe that there is not just the European development-pattern to be imposed or exported at all costs? Are you convinced that every people needs

*to find its own, original ways towards liberation? Are you ready to become poor? Poor in the sense of needing others, conscious of having to receive from others, feeling deprived? Are you ready to make your conversion, that revolution of mentalities that will allow us to achieve our own revolutions? »*

### *Four Questions*

During the meetings this summer, there have been four questions to help discover the sense and the demands of festival :

- What experiences of festival have I lived through recently? What does festival evoke in me?
- What prevents, hinders or limits the festival in us and around us?
- Where can I really find the sense of festival? What allows me to begin again without being discouraged?
- What is to be done to make the places where we live into liberating communities? (Families, work, school, union, church...)

---

IN THE NEXT LETTER :  
COPIOUS EXTRACTS FROM ANSWERS

---

## **THE CONTINUATION OF THE PREPARATION OF THE COUNCIL OF YOUTH**

First, a **TIME FOR ANNOUNCING**. Large numbers of young people, from every continent, have to join in the long journey we have begun. It will take time for the council to be announced everywhere. Since Easter, 20,000 young people have left Taizé to go back to their 65 different countries. 20,000 witnesses, in communion with each other, in 65 countries, that is already something...

Then there are journeys beginning to distant countries. Margarita Moyano is to visit a number of places in South America. Teams are preparing to leave for Africa, India, the Far East and the Pacific during the coming months. Others, already due to leave for far-off countries, intend to use the opportunity to announce the council and to discover how the joyful news can coincide with the searching of those they will meet.

If there is a long period of preparation before the council, it is also because of a conviction expressed at the beginning : the basic intuitions will come from the Southern continents. We are in a **TIME OF LISTENING**.

The western countries have imposed themselves for too long. The familiar blockage in the West, in society as in churches, will only find a solution in a reciprocity with the South. A small example of this : this summer at Taizé Europeans from the North and from the Mediterranean countries often found communication very difficult — then an African or a South American would arrive and provide the link. An essential undertaking will be this attention to the South, and it will take time. Listening places, set up in points of human poverty, are beginning to exist. At Bombay, for example, a number of young Indians are meeting already, looking for ways of making the council relevant to India and there have been several journeys across the country. One difficulty : the bishop Stanislas from Burundi asked : « How will you join your European impatience to our African slowness ? »

In the preparation of a council of youth we go forward step by step, out to discover, all the time open to new impulses. No question of meeting first, then carrying out decisions : first, *live* ; the council will assemble at the end of a journey made together. We are in a **TIME OF INNER ADVENTURE**, a few main directions can be discerned, allowing us to advance with a common awareness.

The first is : *live*. Not manifestos but life : a life that is changed, tested, gone into in depth, Christ admitted



to the innermost part of life to quicken a festival there. That is why the joyful news begins with the inner festival, from which we advance gradually in the direction exposed in the triple celebration of Christ announced at Easter. As far as the council is concerned, it is not a matter of preparing themes but of preparing ourselves to bear the responsibility that is to become ours.

Some, wanting to share with others, meet in small *living cells* — never more than seven together. Those already connected with movements create nothing new but find ways of sharing the joyful news where they are already. There is just one place of recapitulation per continent, where the meetings to prepare the council are held — for Europe, Taizé. To keep in touch, besides regular correspondance with Taizé, this autumn has seen small cells set up to go and visit others. Three young men have just spent a month in Italy. Others will be going to places in France, Belgium, Great Britain, Sweden, Germany, Spain, Eastern block countries, the USA.

The whole long march is characterised as *temporary* : the preparation will end, the council will happen, it too will end. The cells are flexible, temporary, breaking up as necessary, remaining open to newcomers.

Everything is done with *simple means*. There being no financial reserves, it is always a matter of getting on with what is available. So some girls due to leave for Africa have put off their departure in order to earn their fare. While two young men make a long journey, their fiancées will take holiday jobs to pay for the two tickets. One person could not have made an important journey if a cell had not accepted to look after his family. A few, anxious for a certain community of goods with all, have offered to help with money for journeys when possible.

The *actions* undertaken to prepare the council are already very varied, following individual aspirations, depending on the country, the social context, involve individuals or cells. Always, the inner adventure primes

— immersion in the invisible movement of the Church. Some are brought to take a political option. Others take work in a social action, in shanty-towns or with the most unfavoured human minorities. Others renew their commitment within a Church movement. Always simple tasks, in the knowledge that God does not ask us to accomplish wonders that are beyond us.

At Easter 1971 we shall be able to assess your suggestions, what has been lived at Taizé and elsewhere, and so go on to a new stage.

---

*International weeks will be held again in 1971, from early July until September. Full details will appear in the following Letters. During one of the weeks in mid-July, special facilities will be offered to English speaking visitors.*

---